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ABSTRACT

Extensive research into the effects of racial balancing within schools has yielded little evidence that minority or majority children benefit from such endeavors. A productivity model developed by Walberg, illustrates the type of comprehensive design needed to schematize learning and raise the quality of education for students of all races. This model measures seven productivity factors: ability, motivation, social class, home factors and age. Researchers have shown how the Walberg model may be applied in specific situations. Their efforts point out subtle and complex factors that deserve consideration if learning trends are to be understood. In addition, their findings support the belief that when schools succeed, it is because of support from home and community. If it is true that forced busing weakens the natural and supportive bonds of home, school and community, then it is time to reaffirm educational strategies designed to promote the learning of minority children. The Walberg Model provides the framework for constructing the necessary research designs for improving desegregated schools. (Author/EB)

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Comments on

Optimizing Achievement in a Desegregated School District: The Uses of Evaluation Research"

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Desegregation, usually requiring forced busing, has proven to be one of the most significant issues in American education and the papers presented this afternoon reveal how Walberg's productivity model may be employed to assess integration effects. Overall, the findings suggest that busing by itself may not improve educational quality. This conclusion is in fact consistent with the model inasmuch as home background factors are largely responsible for student performance on five of Walberg's seven productivity factors: ability, motivation, social class, home factors and age. Research suggests that even the two remaining variables, quality and quantity of instruction, are significantly intercorrelated with family and home influences. A logical conclusion to draw from the model is that educators had best join forces with other disciplines, and cast a wide net over as many relevant variables as possible, if intervention programs are to raise the quality of education for students of all races.

Now that the heady 1960s are passed, a period which witnessed a proliferation of unhelpful education innovation, researchers are reporting the need for examining the entire spectrum of the child's learning environment. Usually, the search to empirically understand achievement trends has been discouraging unsuccessful. DeHirsch and Jansky, after conducting an extensive study of educational effects, were unable to conceptually explain learning and recommended that educators explore the interaction of multivariate forces that converge on the child, rather than continue to identify single aspects of functioning which may be predictively linked to learning success or failure.[1] Averch and his associates arrived at the same general conclusion.[2]

In summarizing their research, conducted for the President's Commission on School Finance, they acknowledged an inability to identify a single variant of the existing system that is consistently related to educational outcomes. The willingness of Walberg's colleagues to dare to implement segments of the complex productivity model is therefore most welcome particularly since their results offer hope that, with considerable rethinking of experimental strategies, the oft-cited decline in quality of education may be halted or perhaps even reversed.

Except for Walberg's model-explicating paper, the presentors describe action-oriented efforts to improve education; all employ the productivity model. Each report proceeds beyond the safety of theory and moves into the more quantifiable world of application. This is done in a fashion which demonstrates how parents, school personnel and university professors not only can but did collaborate to exert tighter control over some of the many variables which govern and influence human learning.

None of the researchers suggest that Walberg's model assures smooth going. Rather, each investigator encountered unexpected hurdles, perhaps because they moved to the cutting edge of change. And change is painful. Equilibrium theory describes the psychological disruption which commonly accompanies institutional reform. This in turn helps explain why history cites so many illustrations of educational reform in which schooling practices were either worn into unquestioned, even futile, ideological ruts or powered into all directions in a mindless quest for fashionable innovation. But the success of Proposition 13 heralds forthcoming changes in educational money management which should accelerate the demand for productive school reform and, hence, for application of Walberg's model.

Eash and Bernstein moved beyond school-based learning into the network of home-school-university relationships. In so doing they dealt with such varied

issues as orienting parents and staff; recognizing and dealing with inservice training; handling questions related to role, to anxiety, and to language differences; examining and changing between-school differences in philosophy and practice; standardizing the curriculum; and enforcing standards not only with respect to student learning but also concerning teacher and school administrators' performance. Each variable is shown to have the potential of creating psychological stress and consequently to significantly interfere with student learning, or to discourage educators from continuing the quest for viable change. Fortunately, Eash and Bernstein, as well as other presentors, have described their experiences in sufficient detail so that replication studies may be conducted.

The presentors are unanimous in acknowledging that their experiments were short term in nature and contained uncontrolled variables which contraindicate definite conclusions. They also admit that as some answers were found, more questions arose. Actually, an extensive study would be required to answer just one of many issues: why, over the four years of desegregation, did the sample N drop from 189 to 137? Does this mean, as Coleman has found in other cities,[3] that desegregation - related factors have caused the Park Forest schools to increasingly serve minority and poor children? If so, what are the long-range implications?

A particularly noteworthy aspect of the Walberg model is that it dares to cross disciplinary lines; thus it integrates theory from the fields of education, psychology, and economics. Because of increased concern for accountability, economists are now investigating educational inputs and outputs. Walberg is to be commended not only for his early detection of this trend, but for developing a model which utilizes economic expertise. Economists Summers and Wolfe demonstrated the potential value of such inter-disciplinary efforts in "Equality of Educational Opportunity Quantified: A Production Function Approach." Here they identified

useful and important relationships between student achievements and school resources.[4] But, like the proverbial blind scholars examining an elephant, Summers and Wolfe also perceived the problem from a limited, in this case largely economic, perspective. To illustrate, they found more disruptive students in schools with higher percentages of minority students. But in locating this important economic factor, they failed to explicate psychological nuances which, left unscrambled, limited the usefulness of their findings.

Walberg's model postulates that behavior is a function of personality and environment, and this enables it to approximate the general production equation as much as any psychological theory. With acknowledgement to Lewin, provisions are made concerning forces within and outside the individual. Indeed, the model indicates that any real effort to improve schooling must consider such basic ingredients of the learning mix as preschool, home, and community influences. Learning is therefore interpreted within the context of behavioral dynamics.

The applicability of this wide angle lens to learning is endorsed by Rosenshine's findings that teacher age, sex, experience and even personality are superfluous once the teachers' action of the environmental press on the student is considered.[5] And once the press on students is linked to needs, non-school factors loom large and help explain why, as is convincingly demonstrated by Walberg and other leading theorists, about 60% of the variance in achievement is tied to measures of home environment. This, coupled with Bloom's conceptualizations concerning the saliance of the preschool years when the brain is most rapidly growing,[6] poses tough questions for those educators who prefer more narrow perspectives and intervention programs which are largely limited to remediation within curricular strands.

As noted, Eash and Bernstein probed and sought to restructure the inner life of schools by forming bridges between home and school. They recognize the complexities of the issues and volunteer that their results cannot be unquestioningly generalized to other districts. In this, they echo Thelen's observation that every community, every school district, and every classroom has its own personality.[7] However, Esch and Bernstein may be too modest: their descriptions of what transpired within Park Forest schools should enable other experimenters to make practical adaptations of the productivity model.

In one of a number of useful research applications of the productivity model, Eash and Bernstein implemented a performance-based evaluation of teachers and administrators, employing student achievement as the major criterion. Their efforts seem to have paid off inasmuch as Pascarella, Talmage and Rasher found that Park Forest schools registered achievement gains during the 1974-77 period. But the racial gap did not significantly narrow, and we have the basis of yet another possible study. Moreover, further inquiry might determine whether the higher achievement scores reflect the impact of teachers teaching to the test, prompted to do so by new evaluation techniques. If so, this might be interpreted as bad news. But it could also be a positive signal, particularly at this time of parental concern for basic education, since tests presumably measure mastery of basic educational content.

Pascarella and associates also provide tentative conclusions in a number of issues which are highly germane to quality education. To illustrate, they found low SES students benefitting the most from exposure to white teachers. But positive effects of instruction from white student teachers declined as students' SES rose. Further study may find that it is productive for white teachers, in general, to instruct the most but not the least experientially deprived of ghetto youngsters. However, such findings, although encouraging, are eclipsed in significance by the

observation that, after controlling for students' prior achievement, no single variable made a consistently significant contribution to subsequent achievement in reading and mathematics. Again, an indication that non-school influences must be given full weight if educational quality is to appreciably increase.

Finally, Haertel and Talmage discuss procedures employed in establishing a program which pooled home, school and university resources during the 1977-78 academic year. The project focused on six productivity factors over which home and school were presumed to have some control. Results reveal that school-related factors fared poorly. Only one of the 25 instructional practices considered, "corrective instruction," was significantly related to achievement. Even this singular finding requires further examination: the researchers note that the participating teachers were unusually skilled and therefore not representative of most teachers. The findings must therefore be carefully qualified. Most significantly, and parallel with conclusions reached by Pascarella and associates, Haertel and Talmage identified 13 significant correlations between achievement and home environment factors.

Summing up, extensive research into the effects of racial balancing within schools has yielded precious little evidence that minority or majority children benefit from such endeavors. Walberg's model illustrates the type of comprehensive design needed to schematize learning within all that students experience. Our presentors have shown how the model may be applied. Their results reveal a myriad of subtle and complex factors which deserve consideration in any extensive effort to understand learning trends. The findings converge on a truth which has been passed down through the centuries, but which has often been overlooked or ignored by professional educators: when schools succeed, it is because of support from home and community. If it is true, and I believe that it is true, that forced busing weakens the natural and mutually supportive bonds of home, school and community, then

our knowledge of developmental psychology, as well as research presented here today, indicates that it is time to reaffirm educational strategies designed to promote the learning of minority children and, to coin Lewin's words, to survey entire life spaces.

What does this mean in practical terms? It may well signify that the Walberg model, or a conceptualization equally far ranging, must be utilized in examining many aspects of learning about which we presently know very little. Recently a Dallas Texas study reported that black children learned more effectively in largely minority neighborhood schools than did comparable youngsters who attended schools which had been integrated through busing.[8] This finding does not mean that we should decelerate efforts to build a racially integrated society. It does, however, suggest that perhaps such a society can only be built when educators welcome full participation of a child's nuclear and extended family as well as community resource personnel. The Walberg model proves the framework, and our presentors have very usefully described some of the processes which may be followed, for constructing the necessarily intricate research designs which are so essential if we are to succeed in our pursuit of better schools within the framework of justice and equal opportunities for all.

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